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UNCLAS E F T O SECTION 01 OF 02 LILONGWE 000859

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HARARE FOR DATT  
GABORONE FOR ODC  
DEPT FOR INR/AA  
DIA FOR AFRICA DIVISION/A. DEMOTTE  
NHRC FOR DHAPP

E.O. 12958: DECL: X5  
TAGS: [MCAP](#) [KHIV](#) [PINR](#) [MASS](#) [TBIO](#) [MI](#) [HIV](#) [AIDS](#)  
SUBJECT: MALAWI ARMY SET TO GAIN GROUND IN HIV/AIDS FIGHT

REF: A. 03 LILONGWE 1190

[1](#)B. 03 LILONGWE 336

#### SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (SBU/NF//FOUO) In a resource poor environment, the Malawi Defense Force (MDF) highlights prevention as its main campaign against HIV/AIDS, but has recently scaled up its voluntary counseling and testing services as well as care and treatment programs. USG assistance has helped position the MDF to expand program offerings, as Global Fund and other resources come on line. Although the MDF's infection rate likely remains near fifty percent, strong leadership and effective programs are mitigating the pandemic's impact and are likely to regain the ground the MDF has lost to HIV/AIDS.  
END SUMMARY.

#### RECRUITING A LOW INFECTION RATE, FOCUSING ON PREVENTION

[1](#)2. (SBU/NF//FOUO) Since 2000 when the Malawi Defense Force (MDF) began taking new recruits after a four year, budget-driven hiatus, military entrance exams have included an HIV/AIDS test. Although the MDF has not made the policy public, applicants who test positive fail the health section of the entrance exam and are not admitted to the military. Once the new recruits begin basic training, they take HIV/AIDS specific courses in an effort to keep new recruits seronegative. In addition, HIV/AIDS components have been added to all courses at the Malawi Armed Forces College (MAFCO) and are taught to everyone from enlisted personnel to seasoned officers. The current HIV/AIDS education and prevention training material was funded by the Naval Health Research Center (NHRC) through the Defense HIV/AIDS Prevention Program (DHAPP).

#### VCT SERVICES SCALE-UP WITH USG SUPPORT

[1](#)3. (SBU/NF//FOUO) Since NHRC/DHAPP began supporting the MDF in FY03, the MDF has opened three voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) centers at its three principal barracks. The centers offer the range of VCT services, including rapid testing, behavior counseling, and prevention education, and are open to service members living on the barracks and civilians in surrounding communities. To reduce the stigma associated with individuals visiting VCTs, all three sites have started offering basic clinical services as well.

[1](#)4. (SBU/NF//FOUO) DHAPP funds have also helped support the MDF's home-based care program. However, the program is not yet fully operational because of hiccups with funding for training from the National AIDS Commission (NAC).

#### USING NEW WEAPONS: ARV ROLL-OUT

[1](#)5. (SBU/NF//FOUO) With the GOM's national mandate of two percent of government agency budgets going to HIV/AIDS programs, the MDF recently started offering an anti-retroviral (ARV) therapy program for MDF personnel and their families at the barracks in Lilongwe. The program currently has 75 individuals enrolled and is supported by six ARV-trained MDF medical professionals. MDF HIV/AIDS Coordinator LTC Mafumu Gondwe said the program will be expanding to other military facilities in October as a result of Global Fund support.

[1](#)6. (SBU/NF//FOUO) In recent months, the percentage of infected visitors to the MDF's VCTs has been on the rise. According to Gondwe, offering clinical services and the provision of ARV therapy are the reasons. Gondwe says MDF personnel are much more willing to come forward and face HIV/AIDS when they know they have treatment options available.

#### THANKFUL FOR USG SUPPORT

[1](#)7. (SBU/NF//FOUO) Gondwe and the MDF's senior leadership

routinely thank the USG for supporting the military's HIV/AIDS program. According to Gondwe, as the first to support the MDF's program, the USG has positioned the military to take advantage of Global Fund resources before other GOM agencies. At present, the MDF is considered to be a leader in the GOM on HIV/AIDS response, prevention, and treatment.

COMMENT

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18. (SBU/NF//FOUO) Resources have limited the size of the MDF's HIV/AIDS program, but not its quality. As more resources come on line, treatment and care programs will be expanding, but the MDF plans to maintain its primary focus on prevention. With the senior command committed to delivering high quality HIV/AIDS programs and the recent influx of resources, the MDF should see its infection rate decrease in the medium-term. END COMMENT.  
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